

Central Intelligence Agency



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DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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LIBYA: Qadhafi's Political Position Since the Airstrike

Summary

The US strike last April has aggravated Libyan leader Qadhafi's political problems by humiliating the Libyan armed forces and indirectly stimulating closer cooperation between Washington and West European countries. In response, Qadhafi is tightening his personal security, seeking Soviet assistance in strengthening Libyan defense capabilities, promoting diplomatic initiatives to ease Libya's international isolation, and restructuring his terrorist support apparatus to achieve greater deniability. [redacted]

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None of these measures are likely to significantly improve his prospects for surviving in power. Increased international pressure would further reduce his chances for political survival, which we believe are only slightly better than even through the end of the year. Only in the unlikely event Qadhafi adjusted his radical social and economic policies would he restore confidence in his leadership, even among his closest associates. Any breakdown in the morale and efficiency of the internal security forces--which currently protect him from all but the best-organized and skillfully implemented plots--probably would indicate that his demise is near [redacted]

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This memorandum was prepared by [redacted] the Maghreb Branch, Arab-Israeli Division, Office of Near Eastern and South Asian Analysis. Information as of 16 July 1986 was used in its preparation. Questions and comments should be directed to Chief, [redacted]

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Domestic reactions to the US strike confirm the extent to which Qadhafi's political position has eroded over the past several years. According to press reports, the funeral procession in Tripoli for those killed in the US strike attracted only several thousand marchers out of a local population of about 900,000. [redacted] pro-Qadhafi demonstrations since the strike--highly publicized by the Libyan media--have only been stage-managed by his radical supporters and have lacked the spontaneity and enthusiasm of previous ones [redacted]

[redacted] popular discontent with Qadhafi--already high--has become more open since the US strike. [redacted] Libyans are openly accusing Qadhafi of wasting scarce financial resources on ineffective weaponry. This is in contrast to reporting last year indicating that Qadhafi's pervasive security measures had instilled a sense of fear among Libyans that permitted political discussions only with their most trusted confidants. [redacted] anti-Qadhafi leaflets and graffiti recently appeared in Tripoli and Benghazi for the first time this year. The leaflets reportedly blame Qadhafi for Libya's economic difficulties and for pursuing aggressive foreign policies (see appendix A). [redacted]

[redacted] Libyans are publicly blaming Qadhafi and his aggressive policies for causing the deaths of fellow countrymen during the Gulf of Sidra confrontation last March and the US airstrike last April. [redacted] many Libyans hope US pressure will eventually result in Qadhafi's removal. [redacted]

Even the Revolutionary Committees--traditionally Qadhafi's most fanatic supporters--are concerned about the regime's uncertain political prospects. [redacted] Libyan's refusal to attend meetings called by the Committees to discuss the US strike has driven home to the radicals the depth of antiregime sentiment. [redacted] at least one senior revolutionary official believes his close identification with the regime makes it unlikely he will survive Qadhafi's inevitable overthrow. [redacted]

Military Attitudes

[redacted] confirm heightened discontent among military officers since the US strike. Soon after the airstrike, Qadhafi convened a meeting of Revolutionary Committee members responsible

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[redacted]

security incident did occur.¹ In addition, [redacted] a military officer attempted to assassinate Qadhafi in late April. [redacted] security forces quashed antiregime activity by a military unit as recently as last month.

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Qadhafi's Response

The bombing of Qadhafi's residence almost certainly has convinced Qadhafi that Washington will stop at nothing to oust him. As a result, Qadhafi has strengthened his already tight personal security. [redacted] he is varying his routine even more frequently than in the past to foil would-be plotters. Other sources suggest he is spending more time than usual in eastern Libya--away from his principal residences in Tripoli and Surt, where it would be easier to track his movements. He cancelled his scheduled public appearance on 11 June--a national holiday commemorating the departure of US forces from Libya in 1970--in favor of a televised speech, almost certainly because he feared assassination. [redacted]

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Qadhafi's enhanced personal security is accompanied by renewed attempts to weed out potential plotters. [redacted] many suspected dissidents have been arrested and interrogated since the airstrike. [redacted] in addition to normally stringent precautions against a coup, military officers now are prohibited from associating in groups.

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Qadhafi's renewed approaches to the Soviets--highlighted by Jallud's visit to Moscow--probably are intended in part to help shore up his domestic position. In our view, the Libyan leader may regard increased Soviet military assistance as essential for undercutting dissent in the officer corps and rebuilding his international prestige. Qadhafi may also believe that giving the appearance of closer ties to Moscow would revive traditional West

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[redacted]

European concerns that increased pressure on Libya only serves Soviet regional interests by making Tripoli even more dependent on Moscow. [redacted]

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In addition to personal security Qadhafi's primary concern is undermining Allied cooperation on isolating his regime. The Libyan press is going out of its way to minimize Tripoli's differences with West European governments in an effort to get relations back on track. Qadhafi already has received representatives of an Italian leftist fringe party and an unofficial delegation of West German Social Democrats in Tripoli. He subsequently emphasized the "success" of the Italian visit by releasing an Italian fishing boat seized for alleged illegal fishing. At the same time, Qadhafi's carrot and stick approach includes public threats to withhold potentially lucrative commercial contracts unless West European governments curtail cooperation with Washington on policy toward Libya. [redacted]

Tripoli may also be trying to undermine Arab reluctance to support Libya in its dispute with Washington. Tripoli has renewed its call to Arab leaders for "practical" steps toward unity. Jallud's recent remarks in Algiers--he emphasized the need to work for Libyan-Algerian unity--suggest that his visit there may have been intended as a first step toward easing Libya's isolation in the Arab world. Unity probably also is behind Qadhafi's willingness to host a recent reconciliation effort involving leaders of North and South Yemen. [redacted]

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Domestically, Qadhafi is offering symbolic concessions to pragmatists in the Libyan military in an attempt to discourage plotting. [redacted] Qadhafi hinted at reconstituting the defunct Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) comprising members of the 11-man Free Officers group that brought him to power in 1969. Libyan press indicates that some decisions are now made in the name of the "revolutionary leadership," downplaying Qadhafi's role. The regime is also allowing Free Officers Deputy Chief of Staff Khuwaylidi Al-Humaydi, Inspector General Mustafa Kharubi, and Armed Forces Commander Abu Bakr Yunis a greater public role. For example, Al-Humaydi gave the keynote speech at the funeral for those Libyans killed in the US strike. In addition, the Libyan press publicized Kharubi as the presiding officer at the commissioning ceremony of a new naval vessel recently delivered by the Soviets. Increased press play, however, has not translated into more political clout for the pragmatists, in our view. [redacted]

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Qadhafi's concerns about the loyalty of the pragmatists probably in part is behind several limited changes in policy, including his decision to temporarily supplement intimidation with a conciliatory approach to weaken Libyan dissidents in exile. [redacted] the regime decided in late May to pardon Libyan dissidents on condition that they return to Libya [redacted]

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Qadhafi's new emphasis on Islam may also reflect in part an attempt to appease the officers. Kharubi, in particular, is highly respected in Libya as an especially devout Muslim, [redacted] Qadhafi may also hope reinvigorating support for Islam will diffuse lingering popular resentment over the public hanging of students during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, two years ago. Tripoli reportedly also increased food imports in late May, apparently to coincide with Ramadan. [redacted]

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Prospects

Qadhafi's extensive security precautions probably give him only a slightly better than even chance of staying in power through the end of this year. Increased international pressure would further reduce his chances for survival, in our view. A critical factor in our assessment is the reliability of Qadhafi's security forces. There is no sign that the US strike has weakened the loyalty of the Jamahiriya Guard--his hand-picked coup protection force--or other internal security elements. [redacted]

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There are several factors that would further weaken Qadhafi's hold on power. The one of most immediate concern would be his failure to recover fully from the shock of the US attack. Continuing international isolation and constraints on his activity would further erode Qadhafi's already diminished sense of self-esteem since the strike. In our view, such a situation increases the likelihood that Qadhafi may miscalculate and undertake a foreign venture or terrorist attack that would precipitate increased Western economic and political pressures, including another US military strike. Additional US military action, particularly if it focused on attacking Jamahiriya Guard facilities and other symbols of regime support, would encourage potential plotters to try to oust him, in our judgment. [redacted]

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Short of another military strike, a conviction that Qadhafi is losing control could prompt increased infighting among members of his inner circle. We anticipate that such activity would

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include tribal supporters of both Qadhafi and Jallud. In our view, Jallud, one of the leading beneficiaries of Qadhafi's radical political and economic policies, would have little interest in taking on Qadhafi directly unless he believed that his position--or life--were in danger. Moreover, Qadhafi probably realizes that removing Jallud could provoke reprisals by Jallud's supporters, divide Libya's radical faction, and remove a political counterweight to the more pragmatic military officers.

[redacted]

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Nevertheless, we cannot rule out the possibility that Jallud's efforts to maintain a high profile could result in additional instances where Qadhafi publicly humiliates his senior deputy. At some point, this may provoke Jallud's supporters to use violence against Qadhafi's tribesmen. Qadhafi could respond by attempting to purge Jallud and his supporters, triggering additional tribal conflicts that would sap the already diminished strength of the regime. At a minimum, Jallud's other opponents--especially the pragmatic elements in the armed forces--would be encouraged to continue working against Jallud as Qadhafi's successor.

[redacted]

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Qadhafi always has the option of throwing potential plotters off balance by adjusting the domestic political structure. Curtailing the heavyhanded and radical activities of the Revolutionary Committees to supplement the increased prominence he is giving pragmatic military officers exemplifies the type of action Qadhafi could take to buy time for his regime. He could support this reversal in policy by extending his apparent suspension of direct Libyan involvement in terrorist attacks.

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[redacted] Qadhafi had plans last May to "flood" the market place with foodstuffs to ease disgruntlement over shortages.

[redacted]

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So far, however, Qadhafi has found reasons to avoid making the substantive policy changes required to ensure his political survival over the long term, probably because he believes backtracking on two of his most cherished objectives--creating a radical culture in Libya and achieving political predominance among Third World revolutionaries--is equally risky.

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[redacted] Qadhafi refused to make good on his promise to pragmatic elements to announce reforms during his 11 June speech, because he concluded that such a step would discredit his revolution and unduly strengthen the pragmatists.

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Appendix A

Qadhafi's Economic Woes

Widespread dissatisfaction with the declining standard of living remains at the root of Qadhafi's diminished domestic fortunes. [redacted] Libyans are fed up with unprecedented shortages of food and consumer goods. Even military officers--whose most extravagant economic demands traditionally have been fulfilled because of regime concerns about ensuring their loyalty--are dissatisfied with deteriorating economic conditions, [redacted]

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Libyans are using various means to adapt to the economic decline. Hoarding has become a way of life for most and, [redacted] a thriving black market has evolved, despite government efforts to suppress such activity. As an indication of the extent of these illegal activities, Qadhafi is making hoarding a political issue to try to deflect blame for economic problems and to weed out what he regards as "counterrevolutionary" elements in Libya. The Libyan leader is publicly claiming that hoarding by "fat cat" entrepreneurs is causing the shortages. [redacted]

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Behind Libya's inability to recover from its economic downturn are constraints imposed by the continuing soft oil market. Crude oil earnings which provide virtually all of Libya's foreign exchange earnings are projected to total only \$4-5 billion this year compared with a high of \$22 billion in 1981. Although Libyan oil production increased during May and June to 1.3 million barrels per day, [redacted] US oil companies remaining in Libya took the additional amounts to fulfill contractual obligations before their mandated 30 June departure date. With the US companies leaving, exports could drop off by as much as 200,000 barrels per day, while the Libyans make preparations to market the oil themselves. The financial benefits of increased production, however, have been mitigated by discounts Tripoli has had to offer to obtain buyers. For example, Tripoli has had to discount its crude oil by as much as \$1.50 per barrel below spot prices of \$10 per barrel to sustain increased exports. [redacted]

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[REDACTED]

These compelling constraints are causing Libya to impose increasingly harsh austerity measures. [REDACTED] salaries of government and military personnel are now directly deposited in government-controlled accounts as a means of controlling foreign exchange and domestic consumption. [REDACTED] the Libyans are mothballing an aluminum smelter and steel mill, two of Qadhafi's most prestigious development projects. [REDACTED]

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Appendix B

Jallud: Lining Up for the Succession

The US airstrike has indirectly contributed to political instability by inciting renewed political maneuvering among Qadhafi's lieutenants. Such infighting is the first since Qadhafi's ambitious cousin and confidant, Colonel Hassan Ashkal, was killed last November. Ashkal apparently was executed when he violated the terms of his confinement resulting from accusations of insufficient loyalty by his political rivals. [REDACTED]

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Qadhafi and Jallud

Qadhafi's principal deputy, Abd Al-Salam Jallud, is the focal point of the current political struggle. Following the US strike, [REDACTED], the regime accused Jallud of failing to immediately pledge his support for Qadhafi. Qadhafi's supporters also cite Jallud's mismanagement of a highly publicized press conference following the attack as evidence of his incompetence and questionable loyalty. [REDACTED]

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Behind the criticism may be a perception that Jallud was trying to use the press conference--the first public appearance before the international media by a senior Libyan official following the strike--to upstage Qadhafi at a time when the Libyan leader was psychologically shaken. This appearance is in contrast to Qadhafi's earlier lackluster performance on Libyan domestic television, in which he appeared tired and distraught. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Jallud was already maneuvering to strengthen his position as Qadhafi's successor last year in the belief that increased popular discontent would lead to Qadhafi's removal. Jallud also may in part be responding to pressure from his supporters to challenge Qadhafi openly; [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Jallud's tribe was urging him to try to remove Qadhafi last month. Jallud's tribemen--the Maghara--have long been opposed to what they regard as the undeserved prominence of Qadhafi's tribe--the Qadhaafa--which is numerically smaller. [REDACTED]

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Such pressures may be behind Jallud's attempt to test the extent of Soviet support for Qadhafi during his visit to Moscow

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last May. During talks with Soviet officials, Jallud privately offered the Soviets bases in Libya in an apparent attempt to ingratiate himself with Moscow, [redacted]

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There are signs that Qadhafi already is trying to rein in Jallud. The French have information that Qadhafi humiliated Jallud upon his return from Moscow for exceeding his authority there by throwing water in his face. [redacted]

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It is not clear whether the friction between the two has gone far enough to threaten Jallud's life. A prominent West German publication claimed in mid-June that two of Qadhafi's tribesmen tried to assassinate Jallud last May. [redacted]

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[redacted] the attackers were only trying to ransack Jallud's house while Jallud was under temporary detention, presumably because of Qadhafi's annoyance with him. [redacted]

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Jallud Faces the Military

Jallud's difficulties with Qadhafi and his tribe come at a time when he is having problems with more moderate senior military officers, led by Armed Forces Deputy Chief of Staff Khuwaylidi Al-Humaydi and Inspector General Mustafa Kharubi [redacted] these officers regard Jallud as overly ambitious, corrupt, and debauched, and suspect him of using his position as titular head of the Revolutionary Committee to cultivate the radicals. [redacted] Al-Humaydi and Kharubi are already working to prevent Jallud from succeeding Qadhafi. [redacted]

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A test of political strength between the Al-Humaydi-Kharubi faction and Jallud apparently is brewing over the question of who will head the internal intelligence organization--the General Investigations Department. [redacted] Al-Humaydi and Kharubi are pushing a career intelligence officer as a replacement for a radical Jallud supporter who has fallen in disfavor. [redacted] the officers' candidate has been tentatively approved--presumably by Qadhafi; another says that he has already taken over. In any case, we believe that a setback for Jallud and his radical supporters would almost certainly trigger even more intensive infighting within the regime. [redacted]

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Appendix C

Prospect for Libyan Terrorism

Qadhafi has largely put terrorist operations on hold since the US airstrike, probably because of Tripoli's uncertainty over US and West European reactions to another Libyan-supported attack. Senior Libyan officials--including Qadhafi--apparently believe that another major terrorist attack would prompt additional US military action, including even an invasion by US ground forces. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] Qadhafi is still shaken by heightened West European support for US attempts to isolate Libya since the airstrike --a response he failed to anticipate. [REDACTED]

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There are other reasons for the lull in Libyan terrorist activity. Heightened sensitivity to the Libyan terrorist threat among security forces worldwide has prompted increased vigilance and international cooperation in monitoring suspected Libyan operatives, particularly in Western Europe. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] recent expulsions of Libyan diplomatic personnel by West European governments are forcing Tripoli to develop an alternative terrorism support infrastructure outside the People's Bureaus, focusing on the use of students and commercial cover. This effort has been further necessitated by Tripoli's decision to reduce its diplomatic and intelligence presence worldwide to save scarce foreign exchange [REDACTED]

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Libyan terrorist capabilities also have been diminished by intensified bureaucratic rivalries since the US strike. Some professional diplomats apparently believe the US strike has strengthened their hand enough to more firmly resist pressure from the radicals to become directly involved in terrorist operations. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the head of the Libyan People's Bureau in Paramaribo is involved in a bitter dispute with the radicals over the costs and benefits of terrorist attacks in the Caribbean. The People's Bureau official has gained enough authority to halt plans for a terrorist attack against US interests in neighboring Guyana. [REDACTED]

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Despite these temporary tactical difficulties, the underlying considerations motivating Qadhafi's commitment to terrorist violence have not changed. His speeches and actions indicate that he continues to regard himself as a preeminent revolutionary

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whose mission includes using violence to subvert US and other Western interests. Moreover, Qadhafi's room to moderate his terrorist tactics is constrained by his continuing dependence on Libya's radical faction as his most reliable source of political support. In our view, Qadhafi recognizes that backtracking on terrorist policies for lengthy periods would undermine the revolutionary fervor of these radicals and possibly even their commitment to the regime. [redacted] Tripoli's temporary halt to terrorism since the airstrike already has caused concern among the radicals that they are losing ground to pragmatic elements in the political hierarchy. [redacted]

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Qadhafi may already be taking steps to reassure the radicals of his continuing commitment to terrorism. The recent killing by masked gunmen of a Libyan exile in Paris linked to former King Idris coincided with the revolutionary committee's symbolic burning of a house in Tripoli formerly occupied by a relative of the deposed monarch. [redacted]

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Libyan agents reportedly also continue to surveil and plan attacks on US and other targets. Nevertheless, we believe future terrorist attacks sponsored by Qadhafi against US targets will most likely be carried out by surrogate groups in order to disguise the Libyan hand. Tripoli's reliance on surrogates--particularly the radical Palestinian Abu Nidal group--greatly increases the chance of a sudden, successful attack in which the detection of Libyan involvement would be virtually impossible. Qadhafi will probably be less constrained with hiding Libyan involvement and more likely to sanction direct attacks on Libyan exiles and moderate Arab and African targets because of the diminished likelihood of US and Western retaliation. [redacted]

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